

## (February 3, 2009) Southtown Star: Put the United States first in stimulus plan

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Should Americans spend billions of tax dollars to stimulate the economies of Canada, Pakistan and China?

U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd), of Western Springs, is among a group of congressmen who want to tie the \$819 billion stimulus bill now before Congress to a strong "Buy American" clause.

"When we spend money to modernize the electrical grids or expand broadband Internet, we should use American-made smart meters and fiber optics," Lipinski stated in a news release. "And when we dedicate funds to President Obama's plan for making health records standardized and electronic, we should make sure it creates software jobs for programmers here in the U.S., not in Bangalore."

Billions of dollars in the stimulus bill are earmarked for road and bridge repairs, but until Lipinski pushed his "Buy America" amendment, there was no requirement that the steel and concrete to be used be made in America.

While Lipinski's amendment eventually was rejected, the House did include a provision to buy American steel.

The Senate now is considering its own version of the stimulus plan, and Lipinski and many of his congressional colleagues are stepping up efforts to apply public pressure for "Buy American."

Canadian officials are warning that any such provision would be the first shot in a trade war between the two countries. U.S. Chamber of Commerce officials have said that nations such as China, India and Pakistan will retaliate against American exporters if the United States puts a "Buy American" provision in its stimulus bill.

But here's the nightmare vision that haunts me.

This nation spends billions of dollars on an economic stimulus bill (money we don't even have) and stories like this

appear:

"ACME Widget, of Houston, which received \$2 billion from the economic stimulus plan, announced today it was laying off 300 American workers and opening up a new plant in India."

I understand many of the products we buy are made overseas. I drive a foreign car assembled in this country (a car that has more American parts in it than most cars produced by American manufacturers).

Like most Americans, I look for the best deals when I go shopping, and more often than not that means buying products made by cheap labor in Third World nations.

All of that said, the purpose of this stimulus bill is to save American jobs, help American businesses and maybe even create some new jobs in an economy that is reeling.

American taxpayers are willing to pay for that. In return, any business that wants our money ought to agree to spend it here.

Lipinski notes that U.S. factory activity fell to a 28-year low in December and that the U.S. economy lost more than 2.4 million jobs in 2008, "making it the worst year of job losses since WW II."

I'm normally averse to jingoism, which is an attempt by politicians to curry favor with voters by talking about patriotism while ridiculing foreign countries or foreign people.

But the bill Congress recently passed is called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

I realize we live in a worldwide economy. There's a ripple effect that travels across oceans whenever you throw an economic pebble into the waters.

But if elected officials can't guarantee that this money will stimulate the American economy, they shouldn't be voting for it at all.

We've already seen our tax money used to bail out investment houses, only to watch the Wall Street fat cats give

themselves bonuses. After this stimulus package is passed, I really don't want to hear that a business recipient made a fortune by buying cheap foreign materials.

Yet, I can allow room for debate about whether it's better to allow American businesses to buy cheap raw materials overseas, if in turn that creates more jobs here in manufacturing plants. But the debate ought to focus on the best way to stimulate the American economy and save American jobs.

When I hear people saying that foreign countries may not like the idea of a stimulus plan that helps American workers, my reaction is to say, "I just don't care."

This is a national emergency. That's why Congress has the public's support to spend all this money.

No one's saying consumers can't buy a foreign-made car, TV set or athletic shoes.

But every dime from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act should be spent helping as many Americans as possible. The legislation should guarantee that happens.

It scares me that many in Congress don't seem to understand that.